

Front Porch Forum – Montpelier

Letter related to article in the Saturday July 18, 2015 Time Argus

Herbicide Spraying of RR Line Through Montpelier

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First, let me lay to rest the typo in the front page article in the Saturday Times Argus about this issue. I am NOT a "proponent" of spraying as the article said; the writer used the wrong word! I am definitely an OPPONENT of the use of herbicides on this full 2.5 mile stretch of the RR line that runs through the city.

The Mayor has reached an agreement with the Secretary of Agriculture and the owners of the line to not spray the short section from Granite to Main Streets pending approval of the agreement (available on the city website) by the City Council at their meeting this Wednesday at 5:00. That said, it is probable the rest of the line WILL be sprayed THIS WEEK, possible before the Council meeting.

While I appreciate the efforts the Mayor, the Secretary and the RR owners have put into this agreement, in my opinion it falls far short of what we really need to have happen in the city for these reasons:

- it leaves many people and pets vulnerable to possible health hazards from the glyphosate (RoundUp) that will be used; much of the stretch that will be sprayed is along the river and the bike path, as well as the Peace Park and several businesses. Some people in the area are hyper-sensitive to these chemicals and will need to leave for several days.
- While I have not doubt the contractor who is applying the herbicide will adhere to best practices, there is considerable scientific evidence that the use of this particular herbicide has been problematic. That said, many of our neighbors in town routinely use it on their lawns!
- the agreement stipulates that the city will pay the RR to use mechanical control for the Granite-Main Street stretch. Why on earth should we pay for this? It sets a very bad precedent
- the agreement says longer term means of control will be investigated—fine—but no concrete plans exist for how that will happen. The RR was asked over 18 months ago to make this same effort and has failed to do so.
- from everything I have read, one dose of mechanical control ("weed whacking") at this point will NOT provide the kind of management required of the RR for safe operation. That means this effort is doomed from the beginning. Non-chemical control will require multiple measures, probably 3-4 passes, beginning in the early spring and continuing throughout the growing season.
- too much of this agreement came about behind closed doors with no direct and limited public input or feedback. I certainly have questions and concerns.

If you have concerns, I ask that you call your Council member to express them and also, if possible, show up at the Council meeting. The agreement is on a "consent agenda" meaning there will not be a formal discussion about it UNLESS the Council removes it from that agenda and asks for discussion. In a world filled with many issues and problems, this may not seem huge to everyone, but if you are concerned, please come on Wednesday.

Thank you,
John Snell